

DN disabilitynow

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Time for equality

Nelson Mandela has joined political leaders in backing a high profile new campaign to end discrimination against disabled people and fight the plight of disablism.

Scope's Time To Get Equal campaign* has secured support from Mr Mandela, South Africa's first black president, as well as the leaders of the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru parties.

Home Secretary David Blunkett, who is blind, and Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, were set to help launch the campaign with disabled actress and campaigner Julie

Fernandez as DN went to press.

As part of the campaign, Scope will call for people to sign a pledge to support the idea of disabled people achieving equality (see page 15).

It is also launching a new corporate identity (far right), which includes the campaign's equality logo.

Mr Mandela, whose country has an equality clause in its bill of rights that outlaws discrimination on any grounds, including disability, praised the campaign, and said: "It is so easy to think of equality demands with reference primarily to race, colour, religion and gender, and to forget, or to relegate to sec-



Top backing: Nelson Mandela joined leaders of the major British parties to support the new campaign

ondary importance, the vast discrimination against disabled persons."

Tony Manwaring, chief executive of Scope, said: "This campaign will put the issue of disablism firmly on the public and political agenda. Disabled people in this country lead lives which are blighted by poverty and exclusion and are much less likely than non-disabled people to be able to achieve their potential."

The campaign has also won the backing of Rachel Hurst, director of Disability Awareness in Action (DAA), the international human rights network.

She has become the second high profile disability rights activist to back the charity's new direction this year, following the appointment of Andy Rickell, former chief executive of the British Council of Disabled People, as Scope's diversity director.

Ms Hurst said Britain needed to work towards the kind of society Mr Mandela had championed in South Africa.

She said it was also crucial that the campaign would highlight the word "disablism" and force the government to "acknowledge that institutional disablism exists in the same way

scope

About cerebral palsy.
For disabled people achieving equality.

that institutional racism exists".

Scope also commissioned a report by the research organisation Demos, in partnership with DAA. The report, *Disablism: how to tackle the last prejudice***, suggests creating "trading zones", in which disabled and non-disabled people can collaborate from a position of equal power to discuss problems faced by disabled people.

*www.timetogetequal.org.uk

** www.demos.co.uk/disablism

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Champ's blindness questioned

The world blind golf champion has allegedly been trailed for two months by journalists intent on proving he is not blind.

David Morris hit the headlines after the English Blind Golf Association (EBGA) confirmed he was being investigated over accusations from an anonymous source that he was not visually impaired enough to qualify for the sport.

Mr Morris, from Newquay, Cornwall, has said he was dogged for two months by

reporters trying to catch him on camera doing something which proved he could see.

A spokeswoman for Mr Morris, who was in Japan for a tournament, said he was upset by the experience.

She told DN: "Badgering him like this is like trying to set someone up.

"David is not going out there to dupe anybody - what would he gain from that?"

She said Mr Morris had been registered blind for 20 years and had some light per-

ception, but this did not disqualify him from the sport.

EBGA chair Barry Ritchie said the press coverage of Mr Morris reflected a lack of public awareness about blindness.

"The B1 category in blind sport doesn't mean you are necessarily totally blind. David has had four tests in two years in four different countries and we have the certificates for those tests.

"If it's good enough for the Paralympics, it's good enough for us," he added.

On the cover: Giles Long shaves 0.02 seconds off his European record in the 100m butterfly at the Paralympic swimming trials, to make the British squad. Long won the event at the last two Paralympic Games and hopes to complete a hat-trick. See page 20. Picture by Graham Bool Photography.

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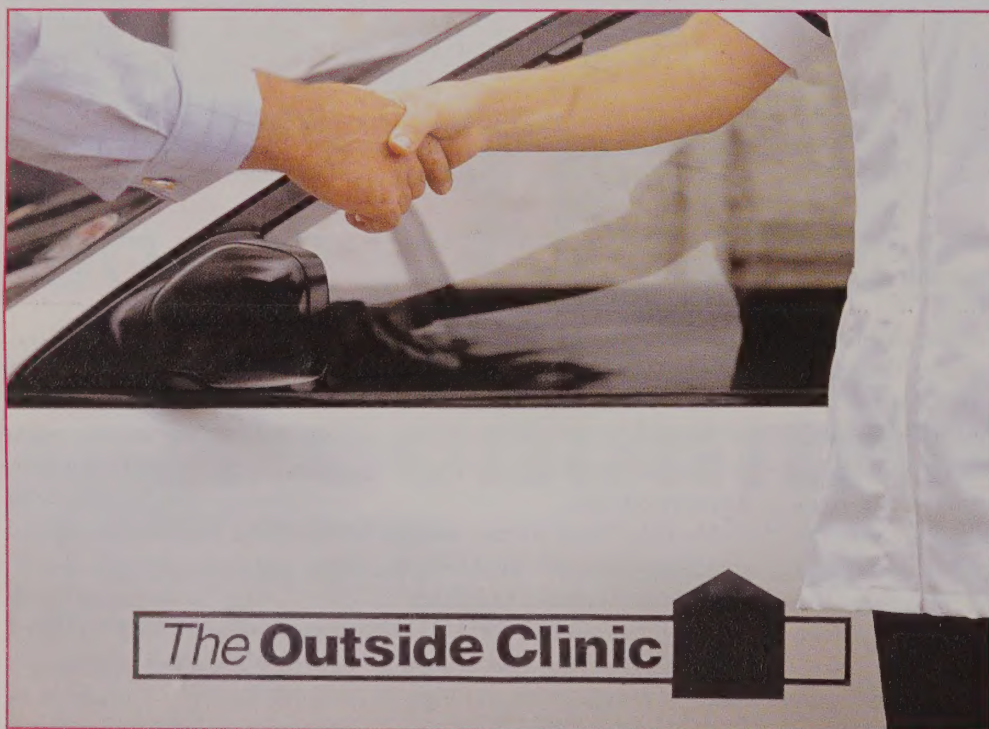
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www.disabilitynow.org.uk

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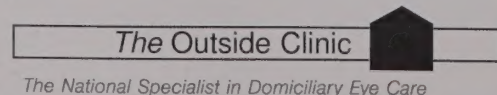
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assistance relating to your eyes or spectacles, you need only to Free Phone The Outside Clinic aftercare service. Your optician will also record a re-test date for your next sight test. As soon as it is due you will be called to make the necessary arrangements. All patients are attended to permanently, by professionals.

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disabilitynow

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19,350
1/7/02 - 30/6/03



Targets 'inadequate'

A minister from the department of culture, media and sport has admitted that government targets for audio description are not good enough.

Lord McIntosh told a House of Lords debate that he thought the ten per cent target in the Communications Act was "inadequate".

The admission prompted campaigners to call for the secretary of state to launch a review of the target.

McIntosh also announced media watchdog Ofcom will review cost calculations on subtitling included in its draft TV access code, which campaigners had warned were inaccurate.

New services have reduced the cost of subtitling, which



Audio describer at the BBC: its output currently exceeds Ofcom targets

may mean up to 30 more channels could be expected to meet targets on access.

Caroline Ellis, parliamentary affairs manager at the Disability Rights Commission, said this was a "significant" gain.

But she warned that other issues were still "on a knife edge" as the deadline for Ofcom's final TV access code approached, including its proposal not to set interim targets for the first five years.

Residential schools need monitoring

Residential special schools need monitoring by child protection boards because local authorities are not doing enough to protect disabled children from abuse, MPs have heard.

Children at such schools should be entitled to an independent advocate and viewed as "looked after" children under the law, according to experts from the National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability.

They told an all-party group of MPs that disabled children are over-represented on child protection registers and are

more vulnerable to abuse, partly because they are likely to spend time away from their families at residential schools or respite care and be in contact with a larger number of services.

But the government's proposed Children's Bill failed to address the specific issues disabled children face, they said.

The group, joint-chaired by the NSPCC and the National Children's Bureau, called for Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs), that are being set up in every area under the bill, to be given responsibility for ensuring schools get high-

quality child protection training and that information about incidents is dealt with properly.

LSCBs should also include a children's champion, they said, and the proposed children's commissioner should have a duty to report specifically on disabled children's issues.

Group member Jenny Morris said the government had not included any of their suggestions in its current bill.

"It is not enough to say that a good child protection system for all children will be a good child protection system for disabled children. It won't."

Gulf veteran starves as inquiry denied

A Gulf War veteran is starving himself in protest at the government's refusal to hold a public inquiry into Gulf War Syndrome.

Alex Izett, 34 (right), was on the 20th day of his hunger strike, and experiencing headaches and kidney pains, as DN went to press.

But he said he was determined to see the protest through "the whole way", to draw attention to the Ministry of Defence's refusal to recognise the condition.

He told DN: "I'm sick and tired of the ignorant way the government has treated brave men and women who were willing to put their lives down for their country."

"We are entitled to a full public enquiry – give us a bit of dignity back and tell us the truth."

Izett says he is not receiving an adequate war pension and has had to move to Germany because he cannot get the treatment he needs on the NHS.

He has had osteoporosis, depression and gut problems since being given inoculations for the 1991 Gulf War.



His protest is backed by the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association, although it does not condone his methods.

Ivor Caplin MP, veterans minister, said the government was doing all it could to address the health of Gulf veterans, including giving them priority treatment in NHS hospitals.

But he said: "Independent research has found no single cause for the illnesses that some suffer."

In brief

Benefit cheque option

Disabled people unable to manage a bank account will be able to receive their benefits or pensions by cheque.

The government is replacing the use of order books with the direct transfer of benefits to bank accounts, but announced that "vulnerable" customers could be paid by cheque instead.

*Tel. 020 7712 2171 or visit www.dwp.gov.uk

Eye treatment centres

A £4 million government programme will test new ways of treating people with chronic eye conditions at eight pilot sites across England.

The Chronic Eye Disease Pilot Programme aims to help prevent avoidable blindness through early diagnosis of glaucoma, age related macular degeneration and low vision.

www.dh.gov.uk



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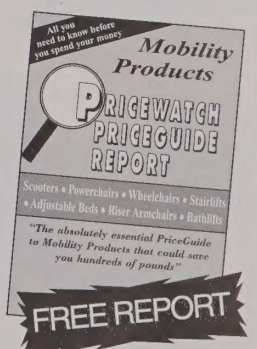
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Planning changes welcomed

Campaigners have welcomed new planning laws which highlight the importance of accessible design.

A coalition of disability organisations, including Habinteg Housing Association and the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), had warned the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act could exclude disabled people (DN Jan).

But following coalition pressure, the government agreed to include a legal duty for developers to include access statements with their planning applications. The act was granted Royal Assent last month.

Meanwhile, the Conservative Party has claimed the government "failed to act in the interests of disabled people" by not backing its amendment to set up a register of accessible housing through the Housing Bill.

Habinteg said a register should ensure accessible homes were offered to disabled people who could benefit from the adaptations. It is lobbying government to include a register in its Disability Discrimination Bill, but is also working with the Greater London Authority and the DRC to introduce a register in London. It hopes the other five regional housing boards will follow suit.

Resprays for bays

DN CAMPAIGN



Scotland's transport minister has pledged to take action to tackle the abuse of disabled parking bays.

Nicol Stephen, a Liberal Democrat, told a Scottish Parliament members' debate last month that he would work with supermarkets, local authorities and disabled people's groups.

He said: "It is time we started to campaign to raise the profile of the issue and gave people some hope that action will be taken."

The debate was secured by Labour MSPs Duncan McNeil and Johann Lamont.

Their motion called for a campaign to raise awareness of disabled people's parking rights.

Meanwhile, Sainsbury's has

acted to ensure more bays are available solely for disabled people, following criticism in DN of its store in Balham, south London.

All the spaces around the store entrance were marked for parents with babies or for parents and blue badge holders.

Now some spaces closest to the store have been reserved only for disabled people.

And the Mayor of Oldham has refused to apologise after her official vehicle was parked in a disabled bay for two hours during a function.

The council claimed the car park's owners gave Valerie Sedgwick permission to park in the space and that her driver would have moved the car if it had been needed by a disabled person.

www.baywatchcampaign.org

• See also page 21



Changing spaces: The parking bays outside Sainsbury's in Balham before (above) and after DN printed criticisms



New carers' rights could be law next month

A bill giving carers in England and Wales important new rights has passed its final stages in the House of Commons and could become law next month.

The Carers (Equal Opportunities) Bill would create a new duty for local authorities to tell carers they may be entitled to an assessment, if approved by the House of Lords this month.

Councils would also have to consider the wishes of a carer to work or take part in education, training or leisure.

The private members' bill was steered through the Commons by Dr Hywel Francis, Labour MP for Aberavon, whose disabled son died seven years ago.

Dr Francis told the Commons during the third

reading: "With more information, appropriate specific childcare facilities, opportunities to work, lifelong learning and leisure, carers' lives could be dramatically improved."

Dr Stephen Ladyman, community care minister, said the government could now "wholeheartedly support" the bill, following various amendments.

Carers UK* said the bill's

passage to the House of Lords was "wonderful news".

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has said he is in favour of extending the right to request flexible working to carers, giving them the same rights as parents, although any change will be subject to a review of the existing laws in 2006.

*www.carersonline.org.uk

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In brief

Free legal advice

A law firm is to provide free advice to help parents of children with autism challenge the decisions of local education authorities through Special Educational Needs Tribunals.

Addleshaw Goddard will help parents who have contacted the National Autistic Society's Advocacy for Education service*.

*0845 0704002.

Book of the year

An autobiography about childhood, ghosts, illness and family has been named Mind Book of the Year.

Hilary Mantel's *Giving Up The Ghost** was chosen for making the greatest literary contribution to helping the public understand mental distress.

The judges were Fay Weldon, Blake Morrison and Michele Roberts,

*Fourth Estate, 2003, £16.99

Farce track

A judge has ruled that it is "reasonable" for a disabled man to travel 45 miles out of his way because of an inaccessible platform at a Norfolk station.

Wheelchair user Keith Roads cannot change platforms at Thetford station to catch a train to Norwich because the connecting bridge is not accessible.

Instead, he has to pay £45 for a taxi to come from Norwich and drive him to the other platform. There are no accessible taxis in Thetford.

Mr Roads took Central Trains to court, claiming that they discriminated against him because of his disability.

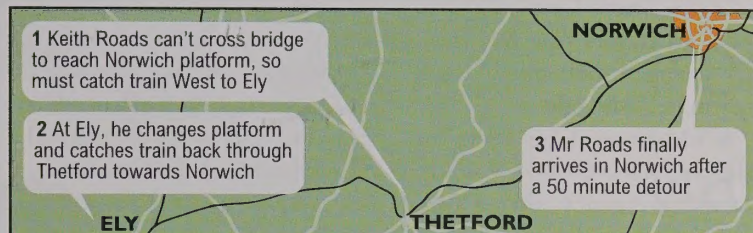
But Norwich County Court ruled that it was not reasonable for Central Trains to pay the cost of the cab fare.

Instead, it said, Mr Roads should accept Central Trains' offer of free train travel to Ely, a station 25 minutes away, where he could change trains to travel back to Norwich.



©EDPPICS 2004

Keith Roads at Thetford station and (below) the "reasonable" journey



Mr Roads said he was "shocked" at the result. "It wouldn't be reasonable for an able-bodied person to go nearly one hour out of their way to complete a journey."

Agnes Fletcher, of the Disability Rights Commission,

which backed his case, said: "Keith's experiences typify the appalling level of service disabled people endure every day."

A Central Trains spokesman said: "If he was a regular traveller it would be different."

Concern over equalities bill

The government's plans for a single equalities commission have finally been published, amid widespread concern that they will not bring disability legislation up to date with that for other groups.

Campaigners welcomed plans in the new white paper* to set up a disability committee for the first five years of the commission's life and guarantee at least one disabled person on its board. But long-standing calls for a single equalities act to put disabled people on the same legal footing as other strands from the outset seemed to have been ignored.

Bert Massie, chair of the Disability Rights Commission, warned that without this, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) would be more likely to fail than succeed.

"From day one of the commission's life there would be serious fault lines in its legal powers across the strands which could sow the seeds for future disharmony," he said. "It is not too late for the government to think again on this and give the CEHR a better start."

Kate Nash, director of RADAR, said the joint commission could make important inroads in mainstreaming disability equality, but warned: "The fact that current disability rights legislation contains substantial loopholes as well as provisions for 'justifiable' less favourable treatment means that disabled people have yet to win comprehensive human rights."

* *Fairness For All: A New Commission For Equality And Human Rights*, www.dti.gov.uk. To respond, email: equality.project@dti.gsi.gov.uk by 6 August.

Course will raise police awareness of abuse laws

DN CAMPAIGN

A new training course for police officers should raise awareness of laws that punish care staff who abuse people with learning difficulties or mental health problems.

A pilot project by

Northumbria Police has proved such a success that the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is to ask the Home Office for funding to roll it out across England and Wales.

The project provides training on mental health and learning difficulty issues to specialist officers, so they can offer round-the-

clock assistance to colleagues. The course covers the offences of ill-treatment and neglect in the Mental Health Act.

DN has reported (*DN April*) how Greater Manchester Police was unaware of these offences when considering the death of a man with learning difficulties who drowned in a spa bath.

Peter Bagshaw, assistant chief constable of North Yorkshire Police, who leads on disability for ACPO, said: "I am very pleased, and optimistic that this new training will enhance the quality of response the police are able to give when people with learning difficulties or mental health problems

come to our attention."

Meanwhile, DN and the charity Turning Point have met officials from the departments of health and constitutional affairs (DCA) to discuss the campaign.

A DCA spokeswoman said they found the meeting "useful and productive".

It's official... there are 9.8 million disabled adults

Disability campaigners have welcomed the government's announcement that there are 9.8 million disabled adults in the UK.

The figures, based on new statistics, use the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) but don't include people in long-term care or children.

RADAR's Kate Nash said having an official figure of almost ten million, compared with the previous 8.6 million, gives more recognition to disabled people and "more credibility to campaigning".

The Disability Rights Commission, which will also use the figure, said more accurate statistics will enable the government to plan services better.

But Lorna Reith, of the Disability Alliance, said: "The DDA definition includes a lot of people who couldn't claim disability benefits."

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Sail away: Michael Aspel (centre back) with members of disabled sailing club Sussex Sailability as he named the club's new boat "Marky" at Sussex Yacht Club, Shoreham-by-Sea. The boat has been adapted for disabled people and will be used by the club's 82 members.

Driven out

A woman with diabetes who was kicked off a paramedic training course four days before it was due to start has lost her case at an employment tribunal.

Claire Blanshard gave up her job as a hairdresser after she was given a place on the course, but is now doing temporary work with West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service (WYMAS) after it withdrew its offer.

"They knew I was diabetic and said it was fine but then they changed their mind. It's a nightmare," she said.

WYMAS said its decision followed Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency advice that people with insulin-treated dia-

betes should not drive ambulances.

This is despite new laws that came in last year and allow people with well-managed diabetes to drive ambulances.

The tribunal ruled that it was acceptable for the ambulance service to withdraw its offer of employment in this case.

A Diabetes UK spokeswoman said people with diabetes face a "lottery", depending on whether an ambulance service will allow them to drive or not.

She said people with diabetes should be allowed to drive if they pass a medical. The charity is now considering seeking a judicial review to clarify the position.



Tim Hoy (above), of Diabetes Discrimination in Employment, called for an end to "arbitrary discrimination" and said reasonable adjustments should be based on individual circumstances.

Winter fuel backing for social model of disability



Councillors in a London borough have delivered unanimous backing for the campaign to extend winter fuel payments to severely disabled people.

The Haringey councillors were voting on a motion on council tax help for older people, but it included a call for the extension.

Lorna Reith, chief executive of Disability Alliance and a

Haringey Labour councillor, was responsible for the amendment. She said extending the payments to severely disabled people under 65 could benefit more than 5,000 people in the borough.

She said: "I hope local government associations pick up on this and brief local authorities round the country."

Meanwhile, 143 MPs have signed Roger Berry's winter fuel payments early day motion (number 108).

Participation of disabled people in society varies according to where they live, says a new study which offers a scientific basis for the social model of disability.

The survey of 443 families of children with cerebral palsy (cp) across 15 districts in north east England showed participation depended as much on what area they lived in as factors such as intellectual impairment.

In the best areas, the score

for overall participation – including educational and social integration, physical independence and the economic impact of disability – was more than ten per cent higher than the worst areas.

Social integration varied by up to 18 per cent.

The research took into account variations in impairment, from mobility and communication to the type of cp.

Stephen Jarvis, professor of community child health at the

University of Newcastle upon Tyne, one of the researchers, said: "Even when you take into account the different types of children with cp, some children participate far more than others and that appears to be dependent on where they live."

"What is striking is the extent of difference between those who live in the best and worst districts. We aren't saying environment is totally responsible, but we are saying it has a major effect."

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In brief

£500k BSL boost

The government has announced an extra £500,000 to raise awareness of British Sign Language and train people to teach it.

It brings the amount pledged following BSL's recognition last year as an official language to £1.5m.

Those awarded funding include the British Deaf Association, the National Deaf Children's Society and the UK Council on Deafness Consortium.

RNIB Lottery scoop

The Royal National Institute of the Blind has been awarded more than £500,000 by the National Lottery.

The award, the largest the charity has received from the lottery, will be used to reorganise its volunteering scheme and employ ten new regional volunteer development managers.



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New disability bill will ignore trains access date

The joint committee responsible for the new Disability Discrimination Bill has finished scrutinising it and was due to make its findings known as *DN* went to press.

The committee will decide whether the definition of disability should be expanded to cover people with mental health problems, but will not set an end date for trains to be accessible, an issue which will now go out for further consultation.

Speaking in the House of

Lords, Lord Morris of Manchester urged the government to back the Disability Rights Commission's call for public authorities to have a duty to anticipate the needs of disabled people rather than having to react to requests for "reasonable adjustments".

Lord Morris also urged the government to guarantee that the bill would become law during this parliament.

The government confirmed it was "on track" to introduce the bill this parliament.



Going for gold: Danny Crates (left) shows off his Paralympic medal with Ebony Doughin, who won the 100m at a Paralympic-style event organised by Waltham Forest Council and attended by more than 120 disabled children. It supported the London bid for the 2012 Olympics and encouraged disabled children to take part in sport.

Jobcentre ramp blocked

Disabled people in Coventry have to make an appointment if they want to use their local jobcentre because a ramp giving access to the building is blocked by a brick wall.

When the jobcentre opened in March 2003, contractors for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) built a wall to separate its entrance from the estate agent next door.

A spokesman for the building's owner said this was a condition of the jobcentre moving in. But the wall also blocks access from the ramp.

DN reader Keith Hiron, a wheelchair user, now has to make an appointment, go to the back of the building and phone a security guard, to access Sheriffs Court Jobcentre. "It's ludicrous. The build-



"Blatant discrimination": Ramp gives good access to the estate agent, but the wall at the top blocks the way into the jobcentre

ing's got a ramp. For 12 months they've been totally ignoring health and safety regulations. It's blatant discrimination."

A DWP spokesman admitted that the wall blocks a fire exit

and said: "We have been negotiating with the landlord to demolish the wall and are awaiting planning permission to remove the wall and construct a ramp."

Improvements 'barely scratch surface'

Government initiatives to improve the lives of people with learning difficulties "barely scratch the surface of what is needed", according to a charity.

Mencap spoke out after the government published its second annual report* on services for people with learning difficulties.

The report describes new initiatives introduced by government departments, including a conference on parenting to be run by people with learning difficulties, and the involve-

ment of people with learning difficulties in the development of the Mental Incapacity Bill.

Health minister Stephen Ladyman said "a lot of good progress" had been made in the three years since the *Valuing People* white paper was published.

He said: "There is still much more to be done to ensure that people with learning disabilities are fully included in society and I would urge my colleagues in other departments not to lose this

impressive momentum."

But Jo Williams, chief executive of Mencap, said: "We feel the government needs to ensure that at local level *Valuing People's* aims are implemented more effectively.

"Local authorities need real incentives to implement the white paper properly and performance indicators to monitor progress."

**Valuing People: Moving Forward Together* at www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/latestnews.htm

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In brief

Find an expert

The Centre for Accessible Environments has launched a free service* to help disabled and older people find experts to adapt their homes.

The House Adaptations Advisory Service is a register of UK professionals with experience in accessible design.

*Contact Paul Highman, tel/text 020 73578182, fax 020 73578183 or email paul.highman@cae.org.uk

Web wisdom

A new centre at the University of East London will use the internet and other new media to help people with learning difficulties, their families and carers communicate and share expertise.

The Rix Centre for Innovation and Learning Disability is named after Mencap president Lord Rix, the university's chancellor.

www.rixcentre.org

Anger at DWP probe

A disabled parish councillor claims the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) humiliated him through an investigation into his expenses.

Terry Picchi (*right*) and his wife Ellaine, from Blidworth, Nottinghamshire, were elected in May 2003 and by December had claimed just £17 in mileage expenses between them.

In April, Mr Picchi received a message from the DWP warning he would receive a visit to discuss his income support. During the interview, he was told he was being checked out because the DWP had discovered he was a parish councillor.



He then had to show his parish clerk a DWP letter asking for confirmation of his expenses and that he did not receive any allowances.

Mr Picchi said: "It made me feel like a second-rate citizen and

a criminal. It was degrading and humiliating."

He said he is now considering not standing for re-election in three years time and wants to hear from other councillors who may have been through similar experiences with the DWP*.

A DWP spokeswoman said she was not able to comment on an individual case, but added: "Our procedures for the investigation of possible fraud are the same for everyone. We have a responsibility to ensure that taxpayers' money is being spent as it should be."

*terry.picchi@ntlworld.com

Letter blitz aims to end means testing for kids

Campaigners aiming to abolish means tests for the families of disabled children applying for the disabled facilities grant are launching a letter-writing blitz on MPs in England and Wales.

The Homes Fit for Children campaign, which succeeded in abolishing the test in Northern Ireland, is writing to every MP demanding to know why parents in England and Wales are still subject to it.

It is also calling on parents of disabled children to write to their local MPs about how the grant application process affects them and urging them to sign early day motion 770.

Meetings are being organised across the country to galvanise support among parent groups and the campaign has the backing of high profile organisations such as Barnardos, Contact a Family and Scope.

Brendan McKeever, of Homes Fit for Children, said parents' influence had been

"essential" in winning the campaign in Northern Ireland.

He added: "We believe it is the right of every disabled child to have a safe, accessible house, but because of the means test, this right is being denied in some cases. The means test doesn't take into account the full additional costs of caring for a disabled child, such as replacing wheelchairs and other equipment, and isn't a true reflection of income and expenditure. If you have a higher mortgage, for example, that's not taken into consideration."

A government spokeswoman said the grant was being looked at under the 2004 spending review, results of which would be announced later this year.

The test had been amended to reflect extra costs involved in caring for a disabled child and funding for the grant had been increased to £101.5m for the coming year, she said.

• *see also page 25*

Frustration at spray delay



People with multiple sclerosis will have to wait at least another month and could have to wait until the end of the year before they can be prescribed a cannabis-based medicine.

GW Pharmaceuticals, the company that has developed a cannabis-based spray,

announced in January that it expected the government to give the go-ahead in June.

But now, it says, it has to submit further information to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency before a licence can be granted.

A GW Pharmaceuticals spokesman said it will have a clearer picture of the timescale involved at the end of this

month but is confident that the spray, Sativex, will be approved.

"We are aware that patients must find it frustrating and are pushing as fast as we can. Our application started in March 2003 and 12 to 18 months is not unusual," he said.

Once a licence is granted, it will take a few weeks for the drug to be distributed and for people to receive it.



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DN CAMPAIGN



Air care plans still grounded

A code to improve air travel for disabled people has been operating for a year – with limited success, says Lucy Glynn

It is just over a year since the government launched a code of practice to improve air travel for disabled people.

But while British Airways, BMI, EasyJet, Excel Airlines, FlyBE, Mytravel and Virgin Atlantic all say they abide by the code, DN readers are not convinced.

The voluntary code was introduced in March 2003 and aims to improve the standard of service disabled people receive when flying and to reduce damage to wheelchairs.

But it is difficult to obtain figures to show how things have improved. Neither transport watchdog the Air Transport Users Council (ATUC) or the Disability Rights Commission keep figures on the number of complaints about airlines or the number of claims for compensation for wheelchair damage.

In March, the government appointed the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to assess the code's impact and it will publish its findings at the end of this year. Until then, measuring progress is dependent upon what the airlines say they are doing compared with disabled people's experiences.

Simon Buck, a spokesman for the British Air Transport Association, admits awareness about disability is limited in some parts of the industry and he expects the first TRL report to be a benchmark, with things improving over the next year.

EasyJet says it is abiding by the code and that in the last 12 months it received only 20 complaints from passengers about wheelchair damage, out of "several thousand of whom travelled with their wheelchairs without incident".

It is in airlines' interest to make sure the code is successful, because none of them want to see new legislation. In a letter to the government about the Disability Discrimination Bill, British Airways said new legislation would place them "at a significant competitive disadvantage"

'I had to be carried off in front of a plane full of passengers. It just makes you really angry'

compared with foreign airlines and that the voluntary code route should be given a proper chance before legislation is considered.

But the experience of DN readers is that airlines are not taking the needs of disabled passengers seriously enough and laws will have to be

brought in.

Regular flyer Fran Williamson, from Cambridge, had her wheelchair damaged on a flight in October. She says there has "been no improvement" since the code was introduced.

Jo Barnes, also from Cambridge, agrees. She was stranded on a plane at Stansted Airport for 45 minutes waiting to disembark. In the end she was strapped into an emergency chair and lifted down. "I was so embarrassed. I had to be carried off in front of a plane full of passengers. It just makes you really angry," she says.

Kathy Gould had a bad experience when she flew to the Greek island of Mykonos in May 2003. When they landed, she was told her scooter was not on the plane, but she noticed the battery compartment for the scooter by a kerb on the way to

the terminal. "The bodywork of the housing had been broken and the broken piece was lying on top," she recalls.

David Peacock's wheelchair was damaged on a flight last year but although he phoned and wrote to the company, he says they didn't respond. "They weren't interested or bothered. In the end, I just paid for it myself. I couldn't be bothered dealing with all the hassle sorting out insurance or compensation. What do you do?"

Peacock is not the only reader who has paid for his chair to be replaced because of low or non-existent compensation rates. This is because compensation for damaged or lost luggage is currently dictated by the 70-year-old Warsaw Convention which recommends £14.82 per kilo, with a maximum of 20 kilos or £296.40.

But as of 28 June, the Montreal Convention will supersede the Warsaw Convention and increase the level of compensation up to £850 per passenger. The government says this will lead to a "significant improvement" for disabled passengers.

However, Phil Friend (above), who launched DN's Flight Rights campaign in August 2000 because he became so fed up with his wheelchair being repeatedly damaged during flights, is not impressed. "Some of the kids' wheelchairs cost £10,000, not £850," he says.

While the code is not perfect, the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee says its existence has helped to increase disabled people's awareness of the service airlines should be providing and so are in a better position to demand them.

Keeping up the pressure on airlines, it seems, is the only way to make sure they realise their responsibility towards their customers, do what they should be doing and that things continue to improve.

• To fill in a survey form visit www.disabilitynow.org.uk



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A month for a seat

A hospital trust forced a man with paraplegia to use an unsafe shower seat for more than a month because its occupational therapy service had been ordered not to overspend its budget.

Even though Richard Church's occupational therapist (OT) had requested "urgent action" on 3 March, her manager said she couldn't place an order for a new shower chair until the end of the month, when the new financial year began.

Mr Church, from Buckinghamshire, first asked for a new seat in January but

had to wait until March for an appointment with the OT.

While he waited for action, he had to wrap tape around the seat, adding to the risk of pressure sores. He had spent nine months of the previous two years in hospital, recovering from a recurrent sore.

The Community OT Service is run by Wycombe Primary Care Trust on behalf of Buckinghamshire County Council.

Mr Church said the situation had been "a farce". "It is not acceptable to say you have run out of money," he added.

In a joint statement, the trust and council apologised to Mr Church for the delay and said they were working to "try and ensure that incidents of this nature do not occur again".

OT's have now been asked to "clearly mark any orders if the patient's health would be put at risk through a delay in equipment being supplied".

They said they were planning to hold some surplus equipment in stock in the future and were setting up a county-wide integrated community equipment store.

Call to end DLA age 'lottery'

A group of 24 charities is calling on the government to end the "arbitrary" ban on people over 65 receiving disability benefits.

The coalition, which is led by Help the Aged, and includes the Disability Rights Commission and the Motor Neurone Disease Association, has launched a campaign* to end the ban which prevents people who become disabled after the age of 65 from receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

The coalition says older dis-

abled people lose out because they are denied the mobility component of DLA, worth up to £41 a week. They are also more likely to lose their independence, because without DLA they cannot use the Motability scheme.

A Help the Aged spokeswoman said older people's exclusion from DLA "is one of the most serious injustices in the current system".

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesman said the government had no plans to

change the law. "DLA is for people who are disabled relatively early in their lives. People over 65 have Attendance Allowance, pension credits, free TV licence and extra fuel payments."

In a separate campaign, the Coalition on Charging is calling for disabled people over 65 to be allowed to apply for support from the Independent Living Fund (DN March).

*Mobilise: End age discrimination in disability benefits. www.helptheaged.org.uk/



Infinite talent: Christopher Gibson, with interpreter Yvonne Strain, in the film *Attack of the Zorgs*, one of the science fiction-themed arts projects deaf Scottish children have been working on with the National Deaf Children's Society. They were showcased at "To Infinity and Beyond", an event funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

Refugee guide launched

A unique and comprehensive guide to help people advising disabled refugees and asylum seekers in London was launched last month.

*How to Access Disability Services**, produced by the National Information Forum (NIF), gives thorough, practical information about legal rights, health, benefits, equipment, education, job and leisure opportunities and relevant charities.

More than 100 voluntary organisations for people with a disability or medical condition are listed separately.

"How I wish we had had something like this in 1967," said Ram Gidoomal CBE, businessman, candidate for London Mayor and president of NIF.

*£5.99 for voluntary organisations, £12.99 for statutory organisations, including p&p. Tel: 020 7402 6681 or visit www.nif.org.uk



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Face value: a new Mencap report encourages arts venues to become more welcoming to learning disabled people. *Welcoming people with a learning disability to your venue* features examples of good practice, such as Sheffield Arena hosting this performance by Oldham Senior Gateway Club. www.mencap.org.uk/download/welcoming_people.pdf

Teachers call for fewer SEN kids

Disability campaigners have refuted calls from a major teachers' union to reduce the numbers of children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools.

Delegates at the the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) annual conference voted overwhelmingly for more special school provision and reinstatement of alternative provision for pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Executive member Amanda Haehner said teachers viewed greater inclusion as a cost-cutting measure which caused "disruption and disaffection".

Parents for Inclusion said it appreciated some teachers felt

powerless, but "casting off children with SEN" was not the answer. It said: "The NASUWT is correct in thinking that inclusion will not come about piecemeal or by dumping young people in inadequate circumstances."

It added: "We know of plenty of schools out there which, by taking a whole school approach to every child, very successfully include every child in their care."

The National Autistic Society disagreed with the NASUWT proposal and called for an ongoing commitment to properly resource the current policy, with more training for teachers in mainstream schools.

It came as an Audit Commission survey showed

schools remain dissatisfied with levels of SEN support from local education authorities.

Meanwhile, education minister Catherine Ashton gave a sign of the government's continued commitment to inclusion by backing two new publications aimed at supporting inclusive education*.

And the government is seeking views** on how the achievements of children with SEN can be fairly reflected in school league tables.

*All Equal: All Different, teachers' resource pack, tel: 020 7359 2855; Index for Inclusion, a set of materials to support early years settings, £26, tel: 0117 344 4007

**See web: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm

Chip and win Smart home opens doors

Disabled people have welcomed a new system that authorises credit and debit card payments with a four-digit PIN number instead of a signature.

Research carried out by the Chip and PIN (CAP) programme found 86 per cent of disabled and older cardholders questioned liked the new system, although some people with learning difficulties were wor-

ried about remembering PINs.

The Disability Rights Commission said CAP should continue to work with disabled people's groups as the new system was phased in.

CAP said that those who found the system difficult should contact their bank to discuss alternatives.

www.chipandpin.co.uk

• see *Get in Gear*, page 20

The first "smart" home for people with dementia opens this month in east London, providing new technology to enable people to live more independently.

The pioneering flat, designed by Bath Institute of Medical Engineering (BIME), features a cooker which warns people when their food is overheating; lights which come on if they get up to use the toilet; a bath which

warns if it is getting full; and prompts to go back to bed if people wander during the night.

The design attempts to mirror the responses of personal carers and puts the person with dementia more in control, with the house providing verbal prompts before taking action to turn off taps, shut down gas supplies or contact wardens.

If it proves a success, Housing 21, the association involved in

the project, is expected to extend the technology to other sheltered housing schemes.

Dr Roger Orpwood, director at BIME, who spoke about the project at a Royal Academy of Engineering conference, told DN: "Using this kind of technology to support people with dementia has never been done before. We are already getting a lot of interest from housing associations."

WWW.SPACEHOG.ORG.UK

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In brief

GLAD appointment

Greater London Action on Disability has appointed Patricia Pashley as its new chief executive.

She replaces Reg McLaughlin, who stood down after four years to work as a freelance disability consultant and spend more time with his family.

Ms Pashley, who currently works at Disability Wessex and Bournemouth local education authority, will start the job in July.

Correction

Last month, we reported that Southend Council was planning to close many of its public toilets.

In fact, it is Shepway Council which is closing the toilets.

Southend Council has just opened three new blocks of toilets, each of which features accessible facilities.

We apologise for the error.

News review

A round-up of news in the mainstream media from the last few weeks

500,000 abused

An estimated 500,000 older people in England are being abused at any one time, according to a parliamentary report.

The Health Committee said many older people were unable, too frightened or too embarrassed to report the abuse. It criticised the lack of training for professionals and called for stricter controls.

www.publications.parliament.uk

New cooling device

A new device for cooling the heads of babies deprived of oxygen at birth cuts the chance of them dying or becoming severely disabled by brain damage, researchers say.

A team from University College London Hospitals discovered the "cooling cap" technique could minimise the risk of brain damage.

www.action.org.uk

New hips unproven

One in ten consultants carry out hip replacement surgery using prostheses that have not been proved to be effective, a parliamentary committee said.

The Committee of Public Accounts said there had been some improvements in the three years since its last report into hip replacements. But it raised concerns about the large variation in the cost of operations and the one in ten consultants who accepted "incentives" from hip prosthesis manufacturers.

www.publications.parliament.uk

Hormone autism link

Babies exposed to higher levels of the male hormone testosterone in the womb may be more likely to develop autism, a researcher claimed.

Professor Simon Baron-Cohen told the British Psychological Society of a link between higher levels of the hormone and social difficulties associated with the condition. He suggested people with autism and Asperger syndrome could have extreme versions of a male-type brain, which is less adept at female-type skills like empathy.

Garden shortlisted

A Cheshire museum has been shortlisted for the country's largest arts prize for its work with gardeners from a local day centre.

Norton Priory Museum and Gardens was one of three runners-up for the £100,000 Gulbenkian award. It was shortlisted for a scheme which allows people with learning difficulties

from Astmoor day centre in Runcorn to work on gardening projects alongside museum staff.

Among successes this year was the recreation of a medieval herb garden.

Pictured are head gardener John Budworth (left) and Astmoor member Phil Jones in the Norton Priory grounds.

www.nortonpriory.org



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Spice mice hope



A treatment for cystic fibrosis derived from a curry spice has produced dramatic results in tests on mice and is soon to be trialled on humans.

Scientists at Yale University, USA, found curcumin, derived from turmeric, could "almost completely correct the measurable defects of the disease".

People with cystic fibrosis (CF) have a gene which prevents the protein known as CFTR from reaching the skin's surface, causing problems in the lungs and gut.

Curcumin acts as a molecular chaperone, enabling the protein to reach its rightful position by starving other proteins of calcium.

Problems caused by the defective gene largely disappeared in the tests on mice and a human trial is now being launched by the US

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

Rosie Barnes, chief executive of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, said the results were "extremely encouraging".

"What's great about it is this treatment is effective for the Delta 508 mutation of CF, which is by far the most common gene in the UK," she said.

But she warned the treatment might not have the same effect on humans as mice.

Dr Jane Davies, a CF specialist at the Royal Brompton Hospital, London, advised against people with CF starting to take curcumin until human trials are complete, because of the lack of quality guarantees for supplements and potential interactions with other drugs.

She said a person would have to consume 30 curries every day to achieve the levels equivalent to those given to mice in the study.

Access to baths in hospital still poor

Disabled people still have limited access to showers and bath aids when they are in hospital, according to a new survey.

The research into the condition of NHS bathrooms, published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, found little had changed since a patient survey in 1966.

There have been some improvements, with alarm systems now fitted in all the bathrooms inspected, the use of bath hoists "almost universal" and many taps now "easy to use".

But there were still many problems, including the lack of simple bath aids, showers that were inaccessible to wheelchair users, poor cleanliness

and a lack of privacy.

Dr Andy Monro and Dr Graham Mulley, who led the research, analysed the bathrooms of 46 wards in three hospitals in the north of England.

They concluded: "We suspect that the inadequate state of hospital bathing facilities is a widespread phenomenon."

In all, 72 per cent of patients included in the survey needed help with washing and bathing, making access for disabled people a "main priority", said the authors.

Recommendations included better access to showers for wheelchair users, more accessible mirrors and taps, and improved privacy and cleanli-

ness. They also called for new access guidelines that would become a "key factor" in a hospital's star rating.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said it was working closely with the Disability Rights Commission and had issued access guidance to hospitals and NHS premises.

But she added: "Individual organisations are responsible for interpreting and applying the guidance appropriately so that they meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act."

She said the government had invested £68 million since 2000 in helping to keep hospitals clean and tidy.

Catheter deaths unacceptable

The medical device industry must act to stop people dying from the poor design of bladder catheters, according to a leading expert.

Research shows long-term use of a catheter makes patients three times more likely to die within a year because of infections and complications, yet designs have changed

little since the 1930s.

Dr David Stickler, of Cardiff School of Biosciences, who has studied problems of patients with paraplegia with long-term catheterisation, said the level of deaths associated with the devices was "no longer acceptable".

"At a time when significant technological advances are being made in many other areas of medical care, we should be able to solve the relatively simple

problem of draining urine from the bladder without inducing infections. The medical device industry must be persuaded to take up the challenge," he told a Royal Academy of Engineering conference in April.

The narrow central channels and irregular surfaces inside catheters lead to a build up of bacteria and crystalline material which causes blockages and can trigger problems such as kidney stones and septicaemia.



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About cerebral palsy.
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Time for action

Neil Betteridge is at the forefront of a campaign to unite countries across Europe to tackle arthritis. Nuala Calvi catches him as he prepares to present the results of a survey of MEP's attitudes on the condition ahead of this month's European elections

Arthritis is finally getting the attention it deserves, according to Neil Betteridge, head of public affairs at Arthritis Care and vice president of the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR).

This Monday, he has a meeting with health minister Stephen Ladyman – the first time a minister has agreed to meet with campaigners to talk about arthritis; two weeks ago, he shared a conference stage with health secretary John Reed and Scottish health guru Sir David Steel, the former Liberal leader; this month, he will speak at a meeting in the Reichstag with German health minister Hans-Peter Hofmann.

"These people wouldn't have met with us three years ago. We're making real headway," says Betteridge, from the cluttered London headquarters of Arthritis Care. "We're on the brink of a breakthrough."

The arthritis community is still beaming about its latest achievement: getting a promise from the Welsh Assembly government to develop a national arthritis strategy, the

first in Europe. The hope is to secure a similar concession for the rest of the UK.

It's not before time. Despite arthritis being the single biggest cause of disability in the UK and one of the biggest reasons people claim disability benefits, there is as yet no National Service Framework for the condition and GPs are under no obligations in terms of the treatment they prescribe for patients.

"It's absurd, but it's purely history. People with arthritis haven't found their voice in the

'When you've grown up with a disease associated with older people and women, it is quite oppressive for a young man to identify with'

past, so it's been off the political agenda," Betteridge says.

"And there's an attitudinal problem. People feel they shouldn't bother their doctor about it. It's, 'Oh I'm getting knee pain but I'm just getting old, aren't I?'. It's not just old people who

get it and there are more things you can do to prevent and manage the condition than people realise. That has to be addressed politically."

This image problem is one Betteridge himself has struggled with. After being diagnosed at the age of three and spending early childhood in physio and hydrotherapy, a remarkable remission in his teens enabled him to all but disown the condition.

"I was keen, psychologically, to push it under the carpet. When you've grown up with a disease associated with older people and women, it is quite oppressive for a young man to identify with. I was happy almost to dismiss it as having had a bit of a bad leg as a child."

"But arthritis doesn't go away, even if it is lying low. When I was 30, the old symptoms came back. I could hardly walk, I felt fatigued, debilitated. It was a big blow. But you bounce back."

The experience prompted him to move full-time into the voluntary sector, which he had previously juggled with an academic career. First he went to Community Service Volunteers then to Young Arthritis Care and RADAR.

His return to Arthritis Care in 2000 as head of public policy and campaigning came, he says, from a sense that it was his "natural home".

But fitting in the new role with his work in Europe, not to mention his chairmanship of



Home from home: Betteridge outside Arthritis Care's London HQ

the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), has proved demanding.

Betteridge acknowledges that his separation from his long-term partner two years ago came partly from his working six out of eight weekends abroad. "I have a belief in the work-life balance, but I don't live it," he admits.

Betteridge aims to follow in the footsteps of diabetes and HIV lobbyists, who had the conditions recognised as "major disease areas" at European level. As chair of the EULAR project People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe (PARE), he organised a questionnaire to be sent to every MEP, calling on them to pledge support.

"If you get serious European funding, member states start to take notice. Organisations

are foolish if they don't realise the potential of campaigning in Europe."

Betteridge has also tried to secure more collaboration between health professionals and people with arthritis, through a new partnership, the Alliance Against Arthritis.

Large-scale political campaigning of the type advocated by Betteridge has, however, caused problems with Arthritis Care's grass roots members. In January, a vote of no confidence was passed in the chief executive and board of trustees over moves to focus the organisation more on campaigning and awareness raising and away from support and advice-giving.

Five months on, Betteridge firmly believes the charity is changing for the better and that recent high profile surveys and campaigns are hitting home. One, *OA nation*, revealed the sheer size and scope of the impact of osteoarthritis – 8.5 million people have the condition, with more than 70 per cent disabled by it – and achieved impressive coverage for a condition often invisible in the media.

He believes his job now, in the newly-created role of director of public affairs, is to continue to raise the profile of arthritis as an issue.

"The challenge for me personally is to rebrand arthritis away from its grey, miserable image to a "can do" area of policy," Betteridge says, with quiet determination. He is, it seems, well on his way.

• Arthritis Care, web: www.arthritiscare.org.uk



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Double discrimination

Tens of thousands of black and minority ethnic disabled people are being discriminated against on the basis of their race as well as their disability. The results include higher levels of mental illness and poverty, writes Lucy Glynn

Caroline Henry is verbally abused because she is disabled and called racist names when she walks around her community; but it doesn't stop her going out.

Henry is a member of the Black Friendly Group, a group for African and Caribbean adults with learning difficulties in south London. Another member of the group tried to bleach his skin because he believed he would be treated more equally if he was white.

But it's not just verbal abuse. Jimmy Telesford, of Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD), says black and minority ethnic (BME) disabled people face more discrimination in terms of job opportunities, housing and community care assessments.

Saghir Alam, of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), agrees. "It's multi-discrimination. They are discriminated against because of their race and faith or gender on top of being discriminated against because they are disabled. It's a double whammy and they are living in poverty because of it."

Alam has been working on a guide to help local authorities and community groups provide services for BME disabled people*, which was launched on 5 April.

Despite facing so much discrimination, BME disabled people have few support services because they have little or no contact with white disabled people and so feel excluded from the mainstream disability movement, while their own community groups don't offer the relevant support.

Leo Morgan, Brent Association for Disabled People's chief officer, says BME disabled people often feel isolated within their own community because human rights, especially those in new immigrant communities, are based around welfare and surviving. "The needs of disabled people within that community, their rights and choices, are like we were ten or 20 years ago. They are well-meaning but are based around the medical model, and the voices of disabled people are not heard."

Because of this, Alam says

BME disabled people need to develop their own organisations. "Disabled groups are seen as white middle class organisations. Black and minority ethnic people don't feel like they have ownership of the groups and so don't feel they belong."

But before user-led groups can be set up, BME disabled people need to be aware of the type of services that are available and the benefits a group would bring in helping them access services. At present, many are not even aware of the existence of benefits and other support services.

Last year, Asian Disability Awareness Action in Bradford (ADAAB) helped disabled people in Bradford receive £600,000 in benefits.

"They wouldn't have received that without us. The majority don't even know they qualify," says coordinator Bary Malik.

'I needed support and someone to talk to. I did not need my memory erased'

The organisation also runs seminars on cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, diabetes and arthritis. Last year, over 2,600 people attended the seminars, which are translated and have a separate room so women can attend. Without ADAAB, disabled Asian people in Bradford would find it very difficult to access this information, says Malik.

Labour peer Lord Ahmed says service providers can get away without providing for BME disabled people because they have the stereotypical

white view that they can look after themselves. And because service providers don't understand the requirements of BME disabled people and ignore their cultural needs, the services are rejected, which only reinforces stereotypes such as Asian parents not wanting to send their daughters to mixed sex respite care or day centres and so keeping them at home.

BME disabled people are therefore forced to choose between being a disabled service user and being a BME service user and are pigeon-holed into the cheapest, best fit.

"They continue to design services that are inappropriate and unacceptable, which forces BME disabled people to lose part of their identity," Lord Ahmed said at the launch of the DRC guide in April.

Julie Charles, chief executive of Equalities, the National Council of Disabled People and Carers from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities, says BME disabled people's needs are seen as complex and negative rather than a positive part of someone's culture. "I haven't come across any BME disabled person who has been happy with the system," she says.

This is illustrated by the experience of mental health service survivor Robert Jones. "When I became ill, the first treatment I was offered was ECT," he says. "I needed support and someone to talk to. I did not need my memory erased." He says there are a disproportionately high number of black people on mental health wards, between 30 and 90 per cent. Jones says black people are not more



Caroline Henry, who has learning difficulties, in the video *Telling it Ourselves*, produced by the Black Friendly Group

susceptible to mental health problems, but have more problems because of society's racism and stigmatisation and because mental health staff are "wary" of black patients.

Four years ago, Telesford launched Count Us In, a GLAD scheme to help individuals set up BEM user-led campaign groups in London. He is particularly keen to set up user-led groups of BME mental health users.

One thing is certain: BME disabled people must do as

white disabled people have done. As Telesford says: "BEM disabled people need a platform to campaign for their own issues. Without this, things won't change."

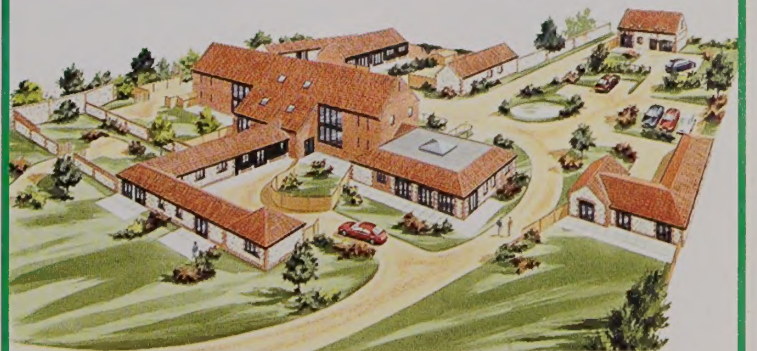
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No dry run on Marathon

Miserable weather and course mismanagement didn't dampen spirits or performances at the 22nd London Wheelchair Marathon, writes Lucy Glynn

The wind and rain failed to put a dampener on the Flora London Wheelchair Marathon – that was left to organisational chaos.

In the men's race, favourite Saul Mendoza from Mexico got off to a good start in his first London Marathon.

He took an early lead and was well ahead at 6.5 miles when he followed the official motorbike down a short cut behind the Cutty Sark.

Not realising he had taken the wrong route, he carried on alone. Fortunately, the mistake didn't affect his position, as Mendoza was clear of the field at the time, with Britain's David Weir and Tushar Patel well behind in second and third places.

The Mexican recorded an easy victory in a time of 1:36:56, six minutes clear of Weir (1:42:50).

Patel also put in a strong performance, keeping up with



Top of the crop: (left) Italy's Francesca Porcellato crosses the line and (right) Steve Williamson on the Mall – he was the fifth Brit home



his training partner Weir for much of the race, and was still in third place until 21 miles, when his tyre was punctured by debris washed into the road by rain. Patel decided to carry on, as he was near the finish and it would have cost him more time to change his tyre.

But this allowed France's Alain Fuss to overtake him and move into third place. Patel couldn't catch up and Fuss finished in 01:45:25 while Patel came fourth in 1:51:03.

Neither Mendoza nor the other racers knew he had taken a wrong turn until after

the race, when there was debate about whether he should be disqualified. The referee consulted Weir and Fuss and decided the result would stand because Mendoza was taken off course by an organisational error.

Don Taylor, chair of Flora London Wheelchair Marathon, said: "He was well in the lead and followed an official motorbike. The short cut was a relatively small distance and what he won by was immense."

Weir decided not to challenge the decision because he wouldn't have caught Mendoza. "If I was 30 seconds behind I would have protested," he said.

Although Mendoza was trying for a course record, it was probably a blessing that he didn't set one because it wouldn't have stood as he didn't complete the full course.

In the women's race, there were only four competitors, with Tanni Grey-Thompson absent due to training commitments ahead of the forthcoming Paralympics.

Last year's winner, Francesca Porcellato, broke from the field at about eight miles and retained her lead to finish in 2:04:58, well ahead of her competitors. She easily beat pre-race favourite Gunilla Wallengren from Sweden, who finished third in 2:14:13.

Porcellato's time was slower than last year because the conditions were difficult and racers had to be careful not to

slip. This was made even harder because the rain made it difficult to grip their wheelchair rims. "This year I'm again the first in London."

"It's fantastic. Last year I worked with a big group, but this time it was harder as I spent a lot of time alone and there was wind and rain too," she said.

Britain's Paula Craig went one better than last year and came second, but her time was outside the 1:54 Paralympic

'There could have been an accident. The roads are supposed to be closed from 8.30am. The police know the times of the races and they aren't supposed to use the road unless it's an emergency'

qualifying time. Nevertheless, she was pleased with her result. "It's such a great race. I was really chuffed to gain second place," she said.

The chaos wasn't confined to the men's race. The racers in the two-and-a-half mile mini wheelchair marathon had to stop when a police car reversed into the road near Blackfriars.

Brian Aldis, who was leading the race, missed the car and second-placed Shelly Woods was able to swerve round it, but third-placed Douglas Stone (*see DN May*) had to stop so all the racers behind him caught up. "I was very surprised. I could have



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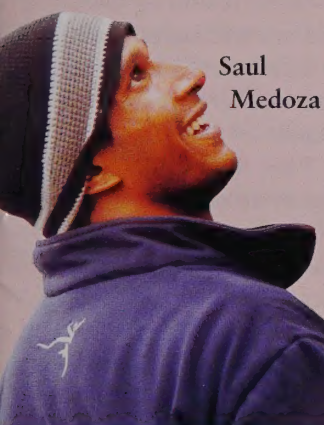


Winner, Men's

Name: Saul Medoza
Nationality: Mexican
Age: 37

Time: 1:36:56

Biog: Has won more than 200 road races. Was named Mexican athlete of the Twentieth Century.



Saul Medoza

Runner-up, Men's

Name: David Weir
Nationality: British
Age: 24

Time: 1:42:50

Biog: Winner of 2002 race. Hopes to be in Athens team.

Winner, Women's

Name: Francesca Porcellato
Nationality: Italian
Age: 33
Time: 2:04:58
Biog: Winner last year

Runner-up, Women's

Name: Paula Craig
Nationality: British
Age: 40
Time: 2:07:52
Biog: Started wheelchair racing three years ago. Came third last year.



Mini wheelchair marathon

Winner 14-17, boys'
Name: Brian Aldiss
Time: 0:10:59

Winner 14-17, girls'
Name: Shelly Woods (below, with rugby star Jonny Wilkinson)
Time: 0:11:54

Winner 11-13, boys'
Name: Mikey Bushel
Time: 0:16:20

Winner 11-13, girls'
Name: Louise Hunt
Time: 0:16:47



Winning in the rain: (Clockwise from left): James Turner, Douglas Stone and Kevin Ward in the boys' mini wheelchair marathon; Britain's Paula Craig and David Weir; Slovakia's Daniel Kukla; and the mini wheelchair marathon winning line up display their trophies (from left) Shelly Woods, Brian Aldiss, Louise Hunt and Mikey Bushel with Jonny Wilkinson in the centre



ashed into it. The person behind me was very close. Luckily he braked," said Douglas. Douglas lost a few seconds and momentum but wasn't too annoyed because although it "messed up" the timings, it didn't change the positioning. "It was good to know I could go to the sprint," he said. Mini wheelchair marathon coordinator Michelle Weltman said she was "angry and upset" about the incident. "There could have been an accident. The roads are supposed to be closed from 8.30am. The police know the times of the races and they aren't supposed to use the road unless it's an emergency and I don't think there were any emergencies."

She will now report the incident to London Marathon officials, who will investigate what happened with the Metropolitan police.

Woods, who is widely tipped as a future Paralympic champion, set a new course record and plans to race in the London Wheelchair Marathon next year, when she turns 18.

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Boccia team is in with a chance

The British boccia team is hoping to win at least two medals at this year's Paralympic Games, after the British Paralympic Association named a four-strong team last month.

Paralympic gold medal-holder and world number one Nigel Murray (*below*) was named in the squad and believes he can retain his title and that Britain can win its first boccia team medal.

Peter Pearse, Susie Robinson and Anne Woffinden were also named in the squad.

Jacqueline Lynn, coach/team manager of the British boccia team, said: "The team are ranked fourth in the world, so we've obviously got a chance."




Pool haul hope

The British Paralympic Association (BPA) has named a 34-strong swimming squad for Athens which it expects to win "a haul of medals".

BPA chief executive Phil Lane announced the team after the Paralympic swimming trials in Sheffield.

The team is headed by reigning triple-Paralympic gold medallists James Crisp and Dave Roberts. Crisp won the S9 class 400m freestyle to set one of three new world records at the trials and Anthony Stephens and James Anderson both set world records in the 200m freestyle in their respec-

tive S5 and S2 classes. Andrew Lindsay (*above*) finished just outside his own S7 world record to win the 100m backstroke. He also came second in the 400m freestyle.

Anderson, Lindsay and Stephens have all made the team along with Rhiannon Henry and Robert Welbourn, who make their debuts.

Double Sydney gold medal winners Jody Cundy, Sascha Kindred and Giles Long were also named.

BPA chairman Mike Brace said the swimmers would win the majority of UK medals. "We will be the best team there. If any one can beat us they will have to be incredible athletes. This is going to be the strongest

British team ever. It's flawless."

Britain's swimmers won 15 golds, 24 silvers and 23 bronzes at the Sydney 2000 Games, more medals than any other nation.

The other team members are: Kenneth Cairns; Gareth Duke; Graham Edmunds; David Hill; Dervis Konuralp; Callum Lawson; Darren Leach; Dave Roberts; Matthew Walker; Marc Woods; Sarah Bailey; Elaine Barrett; Claire Cashmore; Jeanette Chippington; Jenny Coughlin; Janet Fenton; Lara Ferguson; Jemma Houghton; Elizabeth Johnson; Natalie Jones; Mhairi Love; Nyree Lewis; Margaret McEleny; Danielle Watts; Fran Williamson.

Further ban for learning disabled athletes

Swimmers with learning difficulties were banned from competing in the Paralympic Games, just days before the UK selection trials were due to take place.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said people with learning difficulties could not compete in the swimming exhibition events because too few competitors had registered.

It is the same reason the IPC gave for banning learning disabled athletes from the track and field events.

Athletes with learning difficulties were banned from medal events when it was revealed that members of the winning basketball team at the 2000 Paralympics were not disabled.

Now, learning disabled athletes will only be allowed to compete in table tennis and basketball exhibition events.

The United Kingdom Sports Association for People with a Learning Disability said the decision was a further example of discrimination against athletes and swimmers with learning difficulties.

Number one heads team

World number one quadriplegic tennis player Peter Norfolk will head the British wheelchair tennis team at the Paralympics.

Norfolk is a member of Britain's eight-strong wheelchair tennis squad and has dominated quadriplegic tennis over the last year.

Meanwhile, Britain's number one wheelchair tennis player, Jayant Mistry, has also been picked for the team, after winning his eleventh national singles title at the National Wheelchair Tennis Championships in May.

Mistry, who is ranked ninth in the world, defeated second seed Simon Hatt 6-4, 6-3 in the final.

In the women's singles final, Kay Forshaw won her second national title with a 7-5 6-2 win over six-time former champion Janet McMorran, in a repeat of last year's final.

Both have been named in the Paralympic team, with Kimberly Blake and Mark Eccleston completing the line-up.

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